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# Youth, Globalization, and the Law

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# Youth, Globalization, and the Law.

Edited by Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh and Ronald Kassimir.

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The fall 2005 riots among migrant youths in suburban Paris and other places in France acted as both an actual and an analytical backdrop to *Youth, Globalization, and the Law*. The riots, which occurred as the volume was being completed, are precisely the kind of contemporary events that it seeks to explain. Sparked by the death of two youths thought to be fleeing from the police, the larger sources of the disturbances lay in the central subject of this collection: "how young people's lives are shaped by the intersection of local circumstances and global flows and forces" [xi]. The editors and their collaborators argue that examining specific experiences of youth with law provides a revealing means of understanding the impact of globalization on the everyday lives of children and young people. The result is a compelling and thought provoking set of essays addressed to the present but that also raises intriguing questions about the past.

The heart of *Youth, Globalization, and the Law* is a series of ethnographic studies of encounters between young people, primarily those between sixteen and twenty-four years old, and the law in sites that cross the globe. The authors are social scientists and legal scholars, each charged with probing the volume's three key terms in a particular locale. Their success in meeting that charge gives the collection a common frame of reference and analysis often lacking in such projects.

Several interlocking themes emerge from the essays. Prime among them is the importance of context. The analytical rewards of this emphasis are evident in a study of Salvadoran refugee gang youth by Elana Zilberg. She chronicles the critical connections between United States policies devised to manage migration and transnational gang violence with the policies and experiences of officials, agencies, and youths in Salvador. Zero Tolerance, mounting fears of international urban gangs, and a waning commitment to refugee and citizenship rights, she shows, have different consequences in the two nations. The

essays also demonstrate the power of localism to mediate global trends and the resulting tensions and ambiguities. Two essays, for instance, present clashing assessments of the impact of international children rights. John A. Guidry concludes that Brazilian efforts to aid poor urban children through the conferral of rights influenced international campaigns for children's rights, while also empowering local youths and reframing local and national debates about children. Annie Bunting and Sally Engle Merry, on the other hand, found that local efforts to curb child marriage in Islamic northern Nigeria through the invocation of children's rights floundered because an emphasis in international human rights discourse on individualism and universalism clashed with local beliefs and practices. Inevitably some essays address the key themes of the project more effectively than others, yet *Youth, Globalization, and the Law* is consistently successful in using particular examples to demonstrate how young lives are shaped by the collision of local circumstances with global forces of change.

Though compelling in its own right, the fundamental challenge that *Youth, Globalization, and the Law* poses for historians is determining the implications of its methods and findings for understanding the past. A couple of examples suggest the possibilities of the collection to aid the work of historians of children and youth.

Running through the essays is a putative periodization scheme that marks off the last few decades as a distinct era. The most commonly used label for the period is neo-liberal. By that the authors mean a global shift in policies that include, for instance, a change in criminal justice from a welfare and rights orientation and toward an emphasis on punitive controls and retribution. Representative is Brenda C. Coughlin's argument that marginalized youths in the United States and other developed countries are increasingly managed by agencies of incarceration to the point where a sizable number of young men find themselves in jails and prisons. These policies, she argues, jettison previous commitments to protecting the young and aiding the transition of the young to adulthood. Such arguments replicate other recent studies of children and childhood that see the late twentieth century and early twenty-first as a time of declension. They challenge historians to interrogate assumptions about the effectiveness and success of the previous nominally liberal era as well as to historicize children's experiences in the new period.

Historians might also find that the ethnographic essays in *Youth, Globalization, and the Law* provide compelling examples of how to study transnational developments. For instance, Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh and Alexandra K. Murphy's intriguing analysis of dispute resolution in a Chicago ghetto reveals how community policing has filled a void left by the inattention of city authorities. Gang

leaders, community mediators, pastors, police, and others work out solutions with victims and offenders within a structure of indigenous justice. The authors argue that such private efforts to address crime, delinquency and social problems are supplanting a receding state in urban communities around the world. Studies like this can also be used to ask questions about the past. For instance, Venkatesh and Murphy assume state policing is superior to community policing, but studies of nineteenth-century Philadelphia question that conclusion. Alan Steinberg and Sheri Broder have argued that the shift from neighborhood to municipal policing often resulted in less protection for victimized children and women. Conversely, the Chicago study encourages historians to place studies of particular places in a global historical context. Taken together, the essays raise questions about the transnational settings of children's lives in the past and provide examples of how to globalize children's history in a way that pays close attention to context.

*Youth, Globalization, and the Law* helps us to understand critical issues facing youth across the world at the dawn of the twenty-first century. It also provokes us to rethink how the past has produced the variety of present circumstances so insightfully recounted by this cadre of authors.

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